Attendance Policy

COOMBE HOUSE
SCHOOL

Policy owner:	Headteacher	Adoption Date: March 2023
Approved by company	Board of Directors	
Review cycle	Annual	
Last reviewed on:	February 2024	
Changes made:	Annual review	
Next review due by:	February 2025	

Dorset
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Contents

1. Aims

We are committed to meeting our obligation with regards to school attendance through our whole-school culture and ethos that values good attendance, including:

- promoting good attendance;

- reducing absence, including persistent and severe absence;

- ensuring every pupil has access to the full-time education to which they are entitled;

- acting early to address patterns of absence;

- building strong relationships with families to ensure pupils have the support in place to attend school; and

- promote and support punctuality in attending school and lessons.

2. Legislation and guidance

This policy meets the requirements of the working together to improve school attendance from the Department for Education (DfE), and refers to the DfE's statutory guidance on school attendance parental responsibility measures. These documents are drawn from the following legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

- Independent School Standards Regulations 2014

- Part 6 of The Education Act 1996

- Part 3 of The Education Act 2002

- Part 7 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006

- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (and 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016 amendments)

- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013

This policy also refers to the DfE's guidance on the school census, which explains the persistent absence threshold.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 The Board

The Board is responsible for:

- promoting the importance of school attendance across the school's policies and ethos;

- making sure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties;

- regularly reviewing and challenging attendance data;

- monitoring attendance figures for the whole school;

- making sure staff receive adequate training on attendance; and

- holding the Headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy

3.2 The Headteacher

The Headteacher is responsible for:

- implementation of this policy at the school;
- monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to the Board;
- supporting staff with monitoring the attendance of individual pupils;
- monitoring the impact of any implemented attendance strategies;
- issuing fixed-penalty notices, where necessary;
- leading attendance across the school;
- offering a clear vision for attendance improvement;
- evaluating and monitoring expectations and processes;
- having an oversight of data analysis;
- devising specific strategies to address areas of poor attendance identified through data;
- coordinating calls and meetings with parents and carers to discuss attendance issues; and
- delivering targeted intervention and support for pupils and their families.

3.3 The attendees of the weekly attendance meeting

The attendees of the weekly attendance meeting (typically members of SLT asked to attend by the Headteacher) are responsible for:

- monitoring and analysing attendance data (see section 6);
- benchmarking attendance data to identify areas of focus for improvement;
- providing regular attendance reports to school staff and reporting concerns about attendance to the Headteacher;
- working with multi professional partners, such as education welfare officers, to tackle persistent absence; and
- advising the Headteacher when there might be a case to issue fixed-penalty notices.

3.4 Class teachers

Class teachers are responsible for promoting the importance of, and recording attendance on a sessional basis, using the correct codes, and submitting this information to the school office via the online management information system.

3.5 School admin staff

School admin staff will:

- take calls from parents and carers about absence on a day-to-day basis and record it on the school system;
- transfer calls from parents and carers to the Deputy Headteacher / Assistant Headteacher overseeing the relevant pupil in order to provide them with more detailed support on attendance; and
- contribute towards identification of safeguarding concerns that arise from notifications of any absences.

3.6 Parents/carers

Parents/carers are expected to:

- make sure their child attends every day / timetabled sessions on time *we recognise there may have been issues with transport on occasions which means this has not always been possible;

- call the school to report their child's absence before 9am on the first day of the absence and each subsequent day of absence, and advise when they are expected to return;

- provide the school with more than 1 emergency contact number for their child; and

- ensure that, where possible, appointments for their child are made outside of the school day.

3.7 Pupils

Pupils are expected to:

- attend school every day on time and

- engage with support offered to develop strategies to enhance attendance.

Staff will listen and seek to understand communication from pupils as part of their work to support and advocate for consistently good attendance.

4. Authorised and unauthorised absence

4.1 Approval for term-time absence

The Headteacher will only grant a leave of absence to a pupil during term time if they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'. A leave of absence is granted at the Headteacher's discretion, including the length of time the pupil is authorised to be absent for.

We define 'exceptional circumstances' as those that are rare, unavoidable and of significant benefit or importance that exceeds the benefit and importance of attending school.

The School considers each application for term-time absence individually, considering the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context behind the request.

Any request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated and, where possible, at least two weeks before the absence, and in accordance with any leave of absence request form, accessible via the school office. The Headteacher may require evidence to support any request for leave of absence.

Valid reasons for **authorised absence** include:

- illness and medical / dental appointments;

- religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belong. If necessary, the School will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart; and

- traveller pupils travelling for occupational purposes – this covers Roma, English and Welsh gypsies, Irish and Scottish travellers, showmen (fairground people) and circus people, bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and new travellers. Absence may be authorised only when a traveller family is known to be travelling for occupational purposes and has agreed this with the school, but it is not known whether the pupil is attending educational provision.

4.2 Legal sanctions

Based on the above six strand approach, 'enforce' is the sixth and last option open to the school. Wherever possible, the other five strategies shall be extensively tried before enforcement is considered.

The School or local authority is able to fine parents and carers for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age. Decisions shall be made in line with the guidance within working together to improve school attendance.

If issued with a fine, or penalty notice, each parent must pay £60 within 21 days or £120 within 28 days. The payment must be made directly to the local authority.

Penalty notices can be issued by a Headteacher, local authority officer or the police.

The decision on whether to issue a penalty notice may consider:

- the number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year;
- one-off instances of irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission; and
- where an excluded pupil is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason.

If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the school will liaise with the local authority, who can decide whether to prosecute or withdraw the notice.

5. Strategies for promoting attendance

Improving attendance is everyone's business. The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, and are often specific to individual pupils and families.

The foundation of securing good attendance is that school is a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive environment where all pupils want to be and are keen and ready to learn.

Some pupils find it harder than others to attend school and therefore at all stages of improving attendance, schools and partners should work with pupils and parents / carers to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place.

Securing good attendance is not seen in isolation, and effective practices for improvement involves close interaction with schools' efforts on curriculum, behaviour, bullying, special educational needs support, pastoral and mental health and wellbeing, and effective use of resources.

It is not solely the preserve of a single member of staff, or organisation and is a concerted effort across all teaching and non-teaching staff in school.

Good attendance is a learned behaviour, and our school recognises the importance of developing good patterns of attendance from the outset. We recognise that it is a discrete piece of work but rather it is an integral part of the school's ethos and culture.

In building a culture of good school attendance, our school shall:

- recognise the importance of good attendance and, alongside good behaviour, make it a central part of the school's vision, values, ethos, and day to day life;
- recognise the interplay between attendance and wider school improvement efforts, building it into strategies on attainment, behaviour, bullying, special educational needs support, supporting pupils with medical conditions or disabilities, safeguarding, wellbeing, and support for disadvantaged pupils;
- recognise improving attendance is a school leadership issue and ensure leaders champion and attendance in school;

- communicate a clear vision for attendance improvement, including evaluating and monitoring expectations and processes, oversight of data analysis, and communicating messages to pupils and parents;
- make sure all teaching and non-teaching staff know the importance of good attendance, are consistent in their communication with pupils and parents, and receive the training and professional development they need;
- make sure attendance support and improvement is appropriately resourced;
- set high expectations for the attendance and punctuality of all pupils and communicate these regularly to pupils and parents through all available channels. In doing so, schools should help parents to understand what is expected of them and why attendance is important to their child's attainment, wellbeing, and wider development;
- visibly demonstrate the benefits of good attendance throughout school life;
- recognise that attendance is never 'solved' and is a continuous process by regularly reviewing and updating messages, processes, and strategies; and
- recognise children missing education can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues including neglect, sexual abuse and child sexual and criminal exploitation.

6. Attendance monitoring

Due to the variable attendance histories of pupils that attend our school, monitoring of all attendance matters are prioritised.

Attendance data is monitored daily, to quality assure the use of correct codes and to spot the very earliest signs of changes to attendance patterns.

Weekly meetings to review attendance allows leaders to analyse, intervene and monitor the impact of their interventions.

Wider monitoring identifying patterns over longer periods is carried out, with findings shared with the Board.

Careful consideration is given to ensure that whenever multi-professional support is required, it is arranged promptly.

6.1 Monitoring attendance

The School will:

- monitor attendance and absence data daily, weekly and termly across the school and at an individual pupil level; and
- identify whether there are groups of children, or individual children, whose absences may be a cause for concern.

6.2 Analysing attendance

The School will:

- analyse attendance and absence data regularly to identify pupils or cohorts that need additional support with their attendance, and use this analysis to provide targeted support to these pupils and their families;
- look at historic and emerging patterns of attendance and absence, and then develop strategies to address these patterns; and

- the School will compare attendance data to relevant comparable schools and, where available, to relevant national data, as well as the contextual baseline of each individual (the attendance of each individual in their previous settings).

6.3 Using data to improve attendance

The School will:

- provide regular attendance reports and share with all relevant stakeholders to facilitate discussions with pupils and families; and

- use data to monitor and evaluate the impact of any interventions put in place to modify them and inform future strategies.

6.4 Reducing persistent and severe absence

Persistent absence is where a pupil misses 10% or more of school, and severe absence is where a pupil misses 50% or more of school.

The School will:

- use attendance data to find patterns and trends of persistent and severe absence;

- hold regular meetings with the parents of pupils who the school (and/or local authority) considers to be vulnerable, or are persistently or severely absent, to discuss attendance and engagement at school; and

- provide access to wider support services to remove the barriers to attendance.

The school will consider engaging with Education Welfare, or other relevant multi professional partners based on the following factors:

- when the School feel that the non-attendance of a pupil may be linked to a specific safeguarding concern (for example, child sexual or criminal exploitation);

- the DSL or Deputy DSL judges that a staff concern regarding attendance reported via the school's safeguarding reporting procedures warrants input from Education Welfare;

- if 'Day 1' checks have not led to adequate explanation by parents / carers and a pupil is absent for a second consecutive day;

- when parents / carers are not engaging with School expectations regarding notifying absence and / or are not responding satisfactorily when contacted to explain non-attendance;

- when there has been a significant reduction in attendance, or an ongoing pattern of attendance that causes concern; and

- when strategies to increase attendance are not bringing satisfactory improvement.

7. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed as guidance from the local authority or DfE is updated, and as a minimum, annually, by the Headteacher.

8. Links with other policies

This policy links to the following policies:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection policy
- Behaviour policy

9. Version control

Date of adoption of this policy, by or on behalf of the Proprietor	March 2023
Date of last review of this policy	February 2024
Date for next review of this policy	February 2025
Policy owner (Proprietor)	Dorset Centre of Excellence

Appendix 1 - Recording attendance

Attendance register

We will keep an attendance register and place all pupils onto this register.

We will take our attendance register at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. Using the DfE attendance codes within working together to improve school attendance, we will mark whether every pupil is:

- present;
- attending an approved off-site educational activity;
- absent; or
- unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

Any amendment to the attendance register will include:

- the original entry;
- the amended entry;
- the reason for the amendment;
- the date on which the amendment was made; and
- the name and position of the person who made the amendment

See appendix 2 for the DfE attendance codes.

We will also note:

- whether the code used reflects whether the absence is authorised or not;
- the nature of the activity if a pupil is attending an approved educational activity; and
- the nature of circumstances where a pupil is unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.

We will keep every entry on the attendance register for 3 years after the date on which the entry was made.

Pupils must arrive by 9.00am on each school day. Due to the long distances travelled by some pupils, and the uncontrollable impact of transport delays, the registration window is set at 30 minutes. This does not impact the monitoring and safeguarding processes that are linked to attendance, which are triggered by arrival or non-arrival by 9am.

The register for the first session will be taken at 9.00am and will be kept open until 9.30am. The register for the second session will be taken at 1.00pm and will be kept open until 1.30pm.

Where a pupil is attending an off-site educational activity, or engaged in transitional arrangements, which can have different start times, their attendance will be monitored based on their planned start time.

Unplanned absence

The pupil's parent / carer must notify the school of the reason for the absence on the first day of an unplanned absence by 9.00am or as soon as practically possible by notifying the school.

We will mark absence due to illness as authorised unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

If the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, the school may ask the pupil's parent / carer to provide medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily.

The School takes a similar approach to assessing the authenticity of absence caused by physical or mental illness. There are occasions when 'refusal' might actually be 'anxiety.' Leaders are careful in such circumstances to ensure they identify the root cause of any absence and to use the correct code accordingly.

If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised, and parents / carers will be notified of this in advance.

Planned absence

Attending a medical or dental appointment will be counted as authorised as long as the pupil's parent / carer notifies the school in advance of the appointment.

However, we encourage parents / carers to make medical and dental appointments out of school hours where possible. Where this is not possible, the pupil should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary.

The pupil's parent / carer must also apply for other types of term-time absence as far in advance as possible of the requested absence. Go to section 4 to find out which term-time absences the school can authorise.

Lateness and punctuality

A pupil who arrives late:

- before the register has closed will be marked as late, using the appropriate code; and
- after the register has closed will be marked as absent, using the appropriate code.

Given that most pupils arrive using local authority transport, and due to the nature of the school and its catchment, some lateness issues will be directly due to irregularities in local authority transport arrangements, or traffic issues that are beyond the control of the pupil and their parents / carers. This shall be taken into account by the school in its analysis of attendance and lateness data.

Following up unexplained absence

Where any pupil we expect to attend school does not attend, or stops attending, without reason, the school will:
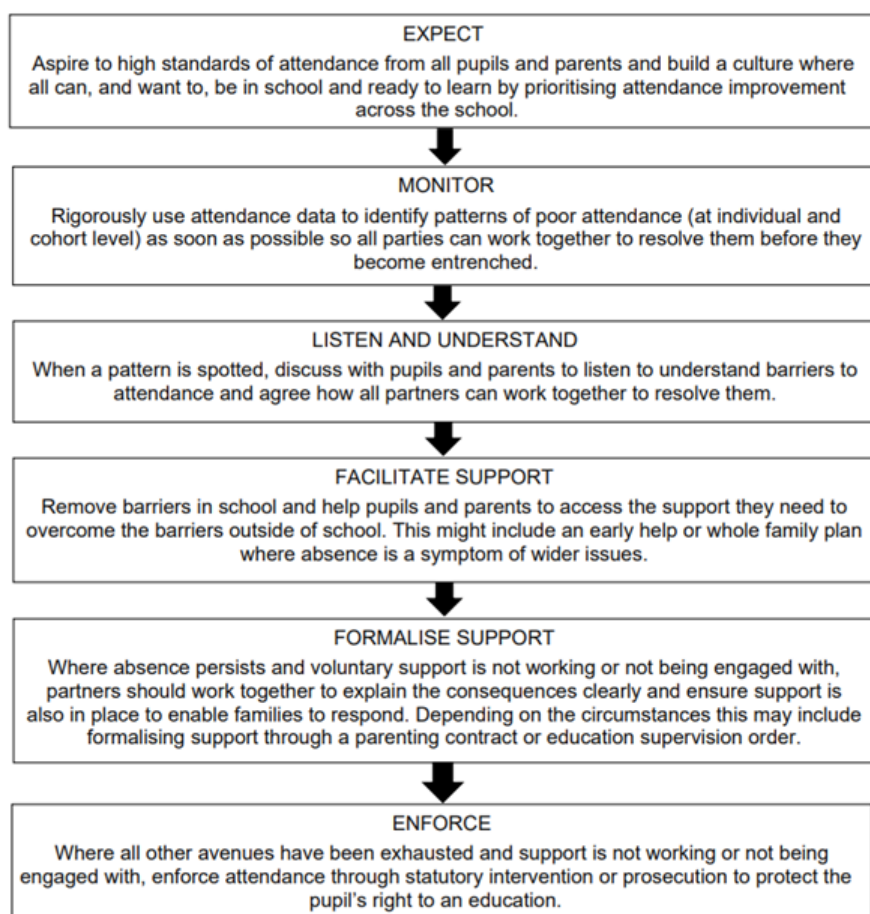
- call the pupil's parent / carer on the morning of the first day of unexplained absence to ascertain the reason. If the school cannot reach any of the pupil's emergency contacts, the school will consider the matter as a safeguarding concern and consult the Designated Safeguarding Lead;

- identify whether the absence is approved or not;

- identify the correct attendance code to use and input it as soon as the reason for absence is ascertained – this will be no later than 5 working days after the session; and

- call the parent / carer on each day that the absence continues without explanation to ensure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary. If absence continues, the school will consider involving an education welfare officer.

Parents/carers as partners

The School will regularly inform parents and carers about their child's attendance and absence levels.

The School seeks to work with parents and carers as partners to address any concerns regarding attendance.

Successfully treating the root causes of absence and removing barriers to attendance, at home, in school or more broadly requires the school and local partners to work collaboratively with, not against families. All partners should work together to:

EXPECT
Aspire to high standards of attendance from all pupils and parents and build a culture where all can, and want to, be in school and ready to learn by prioritising attendance improvement across the school.

MONITOR
Rigorously use attendance data to identify patterns of poor attendance (at individual and cohort level) as soon as possible so all parties can work together to resolve them before they become entrenched.

LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND
When a pattern is spotted, discuss with pupils and parents to listen to understand barriers to attendance and agree how all partners can work together to resolve them.

FACILITATE SUPPORT
Remove barriers in school and help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school. This might include an early help or whole family plan where absence is a symptom of wider issues.

FORMALISE SUPPORT
Where absence persists and voluntary support is not working or not being engaged with, partners should work together to explain the consequences clearly and ensure support is also in place to enable families to respond. Depending on the circumstances this may include formalising support through a parenting contract or education supervision order.

ENFORCE
Where all other avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or not being engaged with, enforce attendance through statutory intervention or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education.

Attendance for pupils who are transitioning into the school

Our school has high attendance expectations for all pupils but believes that in some circumstances, individual needs and circumstances should be considered when designing attendance expectations.

"Whilst every pupil has a right to a full-time education and high attendance expectations should be set for all pupils, the attendance policy should account for the specific needs of certain pupils and pupil cohorts. The policy should be applied fairly and consistently but in doing so schools should always consider the individual needs of pupils and their families who have specific barriers to attendance. In development and implementation of their policy, schools should consider their obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child." Working together to improve school attendance (2022)

Pupils who attend our school will typically have experienced some (often significant) negative prior experiences before their admission with us. This will impact on their ability to attend consistently until they are able to overcome their barriers to successful engagement with education. This can take various lengths of time dependent on individual needs and circumstances.

Alternatively, some pupils who might have transitioned into school successfully, may experience one or more challenges that create new barriers to attendance that require a response comparable to that which they received when they first enrolled.

Based on these individual needs and circumstances, our school shall design a personalised transition into (or back into) school that is ambitious and that always aims for full-time attendance as soon as possible.

In doing so, the school is mindful that for some pupils with complex needs, if attendance expectations are set too high, too soon, it can pose the risk of reducing their short and long term attendance and educational opportunities. It takes care to balance ambition and the risks of 'overstretch' that might cause prolonged or permanent periods of absence.

If a pupil remains on transition arrangements for a prolonged period, they will receive enhanced monitoring from leaders to ensure the school and its leaders take every opportunity to plan appropriate and ambitious incremental improvements.

Where appropriate, if a pupil is within transitional arrangements, they will be offered suitable learning opportunities whilst they are not at school to complement those offered when they are attending. These should contribute towards the long-term goal of full-time attendance.

Whenever pupils are within transition arrangements, the school shall be mindful of their obligations to consider all their safeguarding needs and obligations, in liaison with the DSL.

Attendance for pupils who receive personalised provision

The School shall consider use of creative and alternative provision if it assists reaching an overarching goal of full-time attendance.

This may include pupils engaging and attending their learning programmes but doing so away from the main school campus.

In some situations, following innovate and atypical programmes shall not be an 'alternative' but a permanent and optimal arrangement to aid a pupil reaching their own ambitious attendance and educational targets.

Whenever it does so, safeguarding considerations shall be paramount, and the DSL shall be involved in the monitoring and quality assurance of such arrangements.

If pupils attend off-site (either with the support of our staff, or through their engagement in commissioned 'Alternative Provision'), their attendance shall be recorded and monitored by leaders as carefully as if they were attending on site.

Appendix 2 - DfE Attendance Codes

The following codes are taken from the DfE's guidance on school attendance.

Code	Definition	Scenario
/	Present (am)	Pupil is present at morning registration
****	Present (pm)	Pupil is present at afternoon registration
L	Late arrival	Pupil arrives late before register has closed
B	Off-site educational activity	Pupil is at a supervised off-site educational activity approved by the school
D	Dual registered	Pupil is attending a session at another setting where they are also registered
J	Interview	Pupil has an interview with a prospective employer/educational establishment
P	Sporting activity	Pupil is participating in a supervised sporting activity approved by the school
V	Educational trip or visit	Pupil is on an educational visit/trip organised, or approved, by the school
W	Work experience	Pupil is on a work experience placement

Code	Definition	Scenario
		Authorised absence
C	Authorised leave of absence	Pupil has been granted a leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances

E	Excluded	Pupil has been excluded but no alternative provision has been made
H	Authorised holiday	Pupil has been allowed to go on holiday due to exceptional circumstances
I	Illness	School has been notified that a pupil will be absent due to illness
M	Medical/dental appointment	Pupil is at a medical or dental appointment
R	Religious observance	Pupil is taking part in a day of religious observance
S	Study leave	Year 11 pupil is on study leave during their public examinations
T	Gypsy, Roma and traveller absence	Pupil from a traveller community is travelling, as agreed with the school
	Unauthorised absence	
G	Unauthorised holiday	Pupil is on a holiday that was not approved by the school
N	Reason not provided	Pupil is absent for an unknown reason (this code should be amended when the reason emerges, or replaced with code O if no reason for absence has been provided after a reasonable amount of time)
O	Unauthorised absence	School is not satisfied with reason for pupil's absence
U	Arrival after registration	Pupil arrived at school after the register closed

Code	Definition	Scenario
X	Not required to be in school	Pupil of non-compulsory school age is not required to attend
Y	Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances	The school site or part of it, is closed due to an unavoidable cause at a time when pupils are due to attend. The transport provided by the school or a local authority is not available and the pupil's home is not within safe walking distance

		A local or national emergency has resulted in widespread disruption to travel which has prevented the pupil from attending school.
Z	Pupil not on admission register	Register set up but pupil has not yet joined the school
#	Planned school closure	Whole or partial school closure due to half-term/bank holiday/INSET day